

Inscriptions

– contemporary thinking on art,
philosophy and psycho-analysis –
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A key debate this year has been whether the ongoing pandemic will lead to more international cooperation and solidarity, or if it, rather, will prepare the ground for more aggressive national governance, and a reduction of our lives to a bare minimum, or what Giorgio Agamben has referred to as *Homo Sacer*, where only life-as-such, a mere survival, is what counts when decisions are made.

If Slavoj Žižek has been among the most vocal proponents of the first stance, it was Agamben that raised most debate with his view that the pandemic would instead make possible a swift abolition of our freedoms on the grounds that those who dispose over the state can claim the sustenance of life-as-such as their chief and only task; we may find ourselves in a situation where mere survival trumps all other concerns, thus facilitating an entirely new dispensation.

In this open issue of *Inscriptions* we reprint two short texts by Agamben on the pandemic, contextualised with an introductory note on the debate that they set off. However, state power and its effects are central concerns for several contributors to this issue. Regina Surber discusses a paradigm that has formed the basis of killing in war, and Christopher Norris draws out the consequences of disparate issues such as global migration and the teaching of English in tertiary education to make a coherent literary statement on the rôle universities and their teachers play in the execution of state power, while Philippe Stamenkovic shows some of the consequences that a model for university governance based competition has to someone

standing outside the academic machine.

The position and image of the sovereign is a central concern to both Agamben and Žižek: they ask questions about the face and mask of the governing subject, and its shifting contours in an ongoing contestation over power and dominance. In his text “Obamapour” Leopold Haas paints a picture of a sovereign at the edge of castration, where desire and sentimentality play key parts in the picture we receive. To Mehdi Parsa the health of the subject has come to depend on a world without others, or a state in which life as if on a desert island becomes the precondition for a withdrawal from the exchange economy.

Finally, we revisit the debate over constructivism, the view that our knowledge of social reality and even nature to some extent is contingent on the way we communicate, measure, and conceive of them. Lukas Reimann sets out to show that in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s approach the normative dimension of emotions such as love and depression is properly considered as language games we play with psychological concepts, while Stamenkovic claims that what we need is *not* a more constructivist approach to nature and social reality, but a clearer distinction between nature and society, since only with such a division can science truly be made to serve worthy causes, such as the attempt to mitigate the effects of climate change.

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